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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001390

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: SUMMERTIME SURGE IN LTTE ASSASSINATIONS

REF: A. COLOMBO 1086

1B. COLOMBO 1132

Classified By: CDA JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

11. (SBU) Summary: Over the past six weeks, suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) assassins have killed 29 political opponents, supporters of LTTE dissident leader Karuna, and putative government informants, primarily in the northeastern district of Batticaloa. The six-week tally presents an alarming--and sobering--contrast to the more modest total of the first six months of the year, in which only five assassinations occurred. Some interlocutors attribute the uptick in targeted killings to two possible causes: the Tigers' desire to reassert control in the East after the abortive uprising in March by Karuna and/or a show of military strength to improve their bargaining position should talks resume. Whatever its motivation, this disturbing trend shows no immediate sign of abating, raising fears that the Ceasefire Agreement will be further attenuated. End summary.

12. (U) From July 9 to August 16, suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) assassins have targeted and killed 29 civilians in 16 incidents in various parts of the country. Although the majority of the attacks have occurred in the northeastern district of Batticaloa, the former stronghold of breakaway LTTE Eastern military commander Karuna, and the adjoining eastern districts of Ampara and Trincomalee, LTTE opponents have also been targeted and killed in Colombo and one of its suburbs. Victims have included Karuna supporters (18); members of the erstwhile paramilitary group-turned-quasi-legitimate Eelam People's Democratic Party, or EPDP (9); and suspected Sri Lanka Army informants (2). One especially bold attack took place on August 16 when Tiger hitmen shot and killed Kandasamy Iyer Balandarajah, the EPDP's Media Secretary, as he was standing on a busy Colombo street at 8:00 a.m. Although the Tigers, in typical fashion, have never avowed responsibility for the killings, there is little doubt--including among tacit LTTE supporters like the Tamil National Alliance--of the perpetrators' identity. The grim six-week body count represents the sharpest and most concentrated uptick in LTTE violence against civilians since the beginning of the ceasefire in 2002, and offers a stark and depressing contrast to the tally during the first six months of 2004 (5) or the combined total for all of 2003 (36). (Note: There has been some tit-for-tat retaliation as well. At least six LTTE cadres have been killed over the same six-week period. End note.)

13. (SBU) While the LTTE is widely assumed to have orchestrated the killings, there is less unanimity of opinion regarding the motivation behind the violent campaign. Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, a Jaffna MP from the LTTE-apologist Tamil National Alliance, predictably blamed the killings on the Tigers' frustration at the lack of progress toward resumed peace talks. Because the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) continues to delay serious consideration of the LTTE's proposal for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA), he charged, the Tigers have "decided to take matters into their own hands." Iqbal Athas, the Defense Correspondent for the independent Sunday Times, offered a less benign (and less disingenuous) interpretation of the Tigers' thinking, suggesting that the killings were clearly intended to re-establish LTTE control in the East after Karuna's abortive uprising in March, to eliminate perceived enemies, and to intimidate and terrorize local Tamil populations. Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (a prominent local think tank), speculated that the "Tigers wanted to clean up on the ground (in order) to resume negotiations from a position of strength." The spate of assassinations clearly demonstrates that the Tigers retain the ability to target and kill their quarry "at any time and in any place," he said, which the Tigers believe will exert sufficient pressure on the GSL to be more amenable to negotiations on LTTE terms. All of our interlocutors expect that, in the absence of talks, the assassinations will continue in the near term.

14. (C) Comment: In 2003 the USG recertified the LTTE's inclusion in the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list on the

basis of 36 political killings (as well as ongoing child recruitment). The Tigers have nearly reached that total in just the first eight months of 2004. Apparently carefully calculated and meticulously coordinated, the assassinations are sending a chilling and unambiguous message to Tiger opponents that, Ceasefire Agreement notwithstanding, the LTTE will tolerate no challenge to its authority or its long-standing--if spurious--claim that it is the sole representative of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. Moreover, by killing Karuna's followers and EPDP activists, the LTTE is clearly signaling that even GSL sympathy and support offer insufficient protection from Tiger assassins. Although it remains difficult to assess the degree of Tiger responsiveness to international pressure, the international community has an obvious and an important role to play in publicly condemning such violence. The EU troika's August 16 press statement (which was issued the same day as the most recent killing) and the Department's August 19 release have put the Tigers on notice that this recent spate of violence and terror must end.

ENTWISTLE